

A conceptual framework for understanding the impacts of agriculture and food systems policies on nutrition and health

Agriculture and food systems influence nutritional choices and public health. The co-existence of undernutrition and overweight/obesity is a key global public health challenge. Existing research has attempted to understand the relationship between agriculture, food policy, nutrition and health by looking at linkages within integrated diagrams. However, the authors of this paper believe existing diagrams have not sufficiently captured the full range of linkages. Consequently, a key aim of this study was to review existing diagrams, to integrate and inform a more comprehensive version. This was to provide a visual tool to inform policy makers concerned with improving nutrition and health, particularly in low and middle income countries.

Existing diagrams were identified (n=37) and categorised into themes (UNICEF conceptual framework, trade policy, food chain, food price policy, farmers, synthesis of previous themes, and other). These themes guided the topics of the main boxes and their relationships on the new diagram. The completed new diagram visualises the key influences of agriculture and food systems policies on nutrition and health in a range of contexts (countries with different income levels, rural and urban settings). The new diagram shows there are likely to be many factors influenced by one policy. Arrows have not been included as the influence of a policy can work in more than one direction.

The authors believe the newly created diagram can help policy makers make decisions via three steps:

1. Aid identification and consideration of a policy objective
2. Identify where in a system the policy will have the most impact
3. Give understanding of direct and indirect effects of policy decisions

The diagram can not help selection of one policy over another, or understand how to prioritise actions.

Overall, the authors hope their diagram will help the development of effective agricultural and food system policy solutions by highlighting the bigger picture.

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